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Uniutama mulls expanding operations beyond UUM's needs, says group CEO

SINTOK: Uniutama Management Holdings Sdn Bhd (UMHSB), a wholly-owned subsidiary of Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM), plans to aggressively expand its operations to areas beyond the university's needs.

Group Chief Executive Officer Rusli Hasnan said the company has identified hotel business, opening tuition centres and operating international schools as areas outside the ambit of the university's requirements and intends to venture into these businesses.

Businesses related to the university are running a petrol kiosk nearby the university's campus and promote the university and its hostel complex to foreign students, he said.

"All this while the company's operations were merely providing feeder services to meet UUM's needs, but from this year onwards we have directed the operations to venture out of the university's requirements.

"However, we will still maintain our main role to help UUM," he told Bernama in an interview.

Rusli said the company planned to diversify into the hotel business by running a own hotel in the Klang Valley.

"The hotel, besides receiving normal guests, will also serve as a "transit centre" for lecturers from here travelling to the UUM branch campus in Kuala Lumpur.

"Probably, it may be a three-star hotel. Currently, we have The University Inn inside the UUM campus here, occupied by foreign students," he said.

Rusli said the company would also team up with Perbadanan Nasional Berhad to establish Uniutama Tuition Centres nationwide and later expand the centres

under the franchise concept.

"We intend to set up these centres in every state constituency," he said.

He said the company also intends to establish international schools in Kedah and Perlis to fill the "vacuum" as the two states did not have such a school at the moment.

"The nearest international school for students from Perlis and Kedah is in Penang. We plan to set up one international school initially either in Jitra or in Alor Setar," he said.

Rusli said Uniutama Management Holdings itself would assume the responsibility to "sell" Universiti Utara Malaysia to foreign students and help the university increase foreign students' enrolment.

"We aim to be the "sole agent" to woo foreign students to UUM. For that, we intend to participate in the trade and investment missions abroad initiated by the Malaysian External Trade Development Corporation (Matrade)," he said.

He said the company would also establish tie-ups under the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) to build hostel complexes for foreign students at Bukit Kachi here which could accommodate 1,830 students initially.

Rusli said the company proposed to build a petrol station as the present station was far away from the UUM campus, causing problems for university staff and students to pump fuel for their vehicles.

"Through these plans hopefully to be implemented this year itself, we hope to contribute revenue to UUM in the form of higher dividends than the meagre 10 per cent currently," he added. -Bernama